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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000217

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SUBJECT: ANTI-TUTSI INCIDENT AT KITONA TRAINING BASE

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reason 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) An apparent anti-Tutsi incident at the Kitona military base, where graduation of the Seventh Integrated Brigade was planned this weekend, could further exacerbate tensions in North Kivu. Initial reports suggest that following a dispute between a Tutsi soldier and a Bantu soldier from the Kasais, the latter, who suffered from high blood pressure, died at home (possibly from a stress-induced heart attack but, in any event, from natural causes). In response, troops at the Kitona base reportedly went on a rampage, targeting (according mostly to RCD sources) all Tutsi troops. As many as forty Tutsi soldiers might have been hospitalized; others fled the base and hid in the bush overnight. Apparently the disorder continued for almost two hours (according to PPRD Air Force Commander John Numbi) before Angolan training supervisors arrived to restore order. Though the situation in Kitona has reportedly returned to normal, Sunday's graduation ceremony has been postponed until Wednesday at the request of the Ministry of Defense.

12. (C) Comment: This incident comes at a bad time, with tensions between Tutsis and non-Tutsis still running high in North Kivu. RCD politicians in Kinshasa, and North Kivu Governor Eugene Serufuli, are rightly concerned that biased reports of this incident could inflame passions anew in the troubled province. At least some of the Tutsi troops in Kitona apparently have phoned family members and friends to urge them to avoid military integration. They are reportedly claiming that renegade General Laurent Nkunda is right in arguing that integration is a pretext to transfer Tutsis out of the Kivus and then kill them. While not true that there is any sort of conspiracy against Tutsi troops per se, anti-Tutsi (read anti-Rwandan) sentiment does still run high among certain Congolese and flares up with little provocation or reason, as was the case in Kitona. Unfortunately, the ground in North Kivu is ripe for "evidence" of an anti-Tutsi conspiracy and those pushing ethnically based tensions in the province are likely to capitalize on this incident.

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